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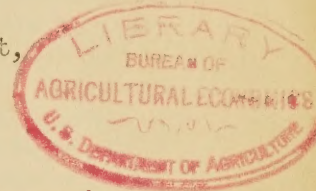
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

CHARTING NEEDED AREAS OF RURAL SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE SOUTH

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Although this general topic has been considered at other conferences in the South and in the Nation, it seems to me that we have here an unique opportunity to chart the course for rural sociological research in the South for the next 10 years. Here we can summarize and criticize what we have said and done about rural sociological research during the last few years. Then we can plan new lines of research adapted to new conditions which have arisen. But better still, we can coordinate our study in such a way that the greatest good for the South as a whole will result.

It is fortunate that already we have in the South a fine spirit of cooperation and consensus of thinking in the rural sociological field. This has been brought about by means of group meetings among rural sociologists of one kind or another. The rural sociologists of the South have participated in meetings of the Southern Agricultural Workers' Association, the Southern Sociological Society, the Rural Sociological Society of America, and the American Sociological Society, and they have been active members of the Population Association of America which held its annual meeting in the South this last year. At annual meetings of these organizations rural sociologists have taken the opportunity to discuss research projects and research plans with one another. Just as significant as these society meetings and organizations have been the meetings on population and farm labor, sponsored by the Social Science Research Council in the South. From the standpoint of planning and coordinating rural sociological research, it seems to me that the meetings held under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council have been most helpful, because in them we have broken away from the conventional pattern of conferences and conventions and have adopted a free and vital discussion method. This type of meeting, where discussion plays a dominant role, is far superior to the individualistic type of paper reading which we indulge in at the annual conferences of Social Science Societies.

Fields of Rural Sociological Research

Delineation of rural sociology into fields of research is practically impossible. Rural sociology itself is one big field of research and there are few fences either around the edges or through the interior sections of the field. The different fields of rural sociological research represent not areas so much as points of emphasis and intensity of research. This point of view is well borne out in the replies of thirty-one outstanding sociologists to an inquiry sent out by Dr. C. C. Taylor in connection with this subject. This inquiry listed sixteen fields of rural sociology and asked for suggestions as to the relative need for research in the different fields. Many of the replies stated that it was impossible and illogical to consider the different subjects as separate fields. Others attempted to group the subjects into more general fields. Nevertheless, most of the correspondents did attempt some sort of ranking or classifications. Taking the replies as a whole, the frequency of mention of each subject was tallied. The results are shown below.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Farm tenancy	23
Population	22
Community organization	20
Mechanization of agriculture	16
Standards of living	15
Rural industries	14
Farm labor	14
Rural education	13
Social and agricultural planning	13
Rural youth	12
Child welfare	9
Land use	9
Rural family	7
Unemployment	5
Recreation	5
All others	12

The frequency of mention of the different subjects is of value because it indicates the points of emphasis around which rural sociological research might well be organized. However, from the above list of subjects a more general classification into larger fields might be helpful. I have attempted to do this and the result is shown below.

<u>Field</u>	<u>Frequency of mention</u>
I. Standards of Living Including income, food supply, housing, health, recreation, education, the rural family, child welfare, patterns of living, etc.	37
II. Social Status and Social Security Including home ownership, farm tenancy, farm labor, unemployment, and mechanization.	59
III. Population Including rural youth, race relations, natural increase, mortality and morbidity, migration, etc.	47
IV. Community Organization Including attitudes, institutions, education, service agencies, organizations, religion, cooperation, etc.	40
V. Social and Agricultural Planning Including land use, rural industries, "Action" programs, etc.	36

Other classifications just as logical might be made from the data available. The above classification, however, does have the advantage of being simple and realistic. Under the five broad fields could be classified 95 percent of all rural sociological studies. Rural sociological research in standards of living defines and measures the basic conditions and needs of rural people. Research in the fields of population and social status locates the problem in social space, measures its extent, and suggests causal factors.

Research in social and agricultural planning points the way for sound public policies and suggests ways and means of putting these policies into practical programs. Research in community organization reveals the motive power and the machinery of rural society -- rural communities, rural organizations, and other rural groups.

The Field of Standards of Living

The first and most important field of needed social research in the rural South is that which has become conventionally defined as "Standards of Living." Broadly and generally defined, this field includes studies of rural welfare, poverty, security, incomes, consumption, levels of living, family budget, content of living, cultural patterns of living, and in addition,

Section 1.1

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1.1.1. The first part of the report is devoted to a general survey of the situation in the country. It is divided into two main sections: the first deals with the general situation, and the second with the situation in the various regions.

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1.1.2. The second part of the report is devoted to a detailed study of the situation in the various regions. It is divided into three main sections: the first deals with the situation in the north, the second with the situation in the south, and the third with the situation in the west.

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1.1.3. The third part of the report is devoted to a study of the economic situation in the country. It is divided into two main sections: the first deals with the general economic situation, and the second with the economic situation in the various regions.

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1.1.4. The fourth part of the report is devoted to a study of the social situation in the country. It is divided into two main sections: the first deals with the general social situation, and the second with the social situation in the various regions.

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1.1.5. The fifth part of the report is devoted to a study of the political situation in the country. It is divided into two main sections: the first deals with the general political situation, and the second with the political situation in the various regions.

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studies of such specialized subjects as: Food production and supply, clothing, housing, health, recreation, use of leisure time, and finally the attainments of the human personality in the intellectual, social, and aesthetic spheres.

The field of "Standards of Living Research" is basic to all other fields of rural sociological research; because, the one all-embracing objective of our agricultural, educational, economical, and social institutions and agencies is to maintain, to improve, and to balance the standard of living of the rural people. We cannot know too much about the standard of living of southern rural people. Accurate and complete information in this field is woefully lacking. More poverty is found in the South than in any other major region of the nation, but we yet know all too little about the extent, character, causes, and location of this poverty.

Many theories and combinations of theories have been advanced to explain Southern poverty. Some would have us believe that it is a simple matter of farm management, or possibly the failure to utilize completely and efficiently the land resources of the South. Others contend that southern poverty is due mainly to soil erosion, but they do not explain to what this soil erosion may be due. It is likely that many factors are involved in the poverty of rural people of the South. The question seems to be one of determining the relative importance of the different factors rather than determining which factors are involved. Most rural sociologists in the South and in the Nation feel that some of the more important causes of southern poverty are to be found in the people themselves and in their culture.

One interesting theory referred to by Jonathan Daniels in "A Southerner Discovers the South," is that the South was populated by people who never loved farming because they did not come from stable, agricultural communities of Europe. Another viewpoint which is worth considering is that the system of tenant farming, closely correlated as it is with single-crop commercial farming, is the cause of a great deal of rural poverty. Quite frequently the correlation between poverty and the birth rate is pointed to -- the assumption being that these two things are in some way causally related. Which is cause and which is effect, however, has never been definitely determined. Another very common point of view is that the South is suffering from certain heritages of slavery, particularly the competition in living standards between poorly paid Negro laborers and the small white farmers who make up a large proportion of southern tenants. Perhaps the cause of southern rural poverty is a combination of these and other factors. In any case, it is quite evident that we know all too little about the problem. Careful research in the field of the standards of living of rural people in the South will reveal many new truths about the character and causes of the poverty of southern people.

In planning specific projects in this field, I would suggest three approaches at least: (1) A re-examination of the historical and cultural origins of southern people, (2) Studies of current changes in levels of living of rural families, and (3) Studies of the effect of current, extension, educational, and action programs designed to eliminate or to alleviate rural poverty.

I am indebted to Dr. Dorothy Dickens, Head of the Home Economics Research in the Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station for the following list of projects in the field of standards of living:

1. Difficulties encountered in improving tenure status and how best overcome.
2. How to get very poor rural families to participate in social organizations.
3. Methods of raising living standards without increasing cash expenses.
4. Possibility of rural industries and handicrafts for improving standards of living of those residing in poor agricultural areas.
5. Possibilities of eliminating the underprivileged classes in the future by improving the situation of children of such families in the present.
6. Methods of adult education for rural youth and middle-aged. What can the middle-aged or older person, able and willing to work, do?
7. Possibility of greater self-sufficiency of families in Delta land changed from status of cropper to day laborers through changes in methods of cultivation.

Standards of living research might be facilitated in the South if some method could be devised which would not be quite so expensive as the conventional survey of family expenditures. In this connection, I should like to suggest two things. The first suggestion is that we continue to search for a standard or level of living index which would make it possible to survey a large number of families and to relate their level of living to other social and economic facts without consuming so much time and funds. Some progress has been made along this line in the U. S. Department of Agriculture and in the States of Oklahoma, Maine, Missouri, and Ohio. The second suggestion is that we might depend more on inventory items and less on annual expenditure items as measures of levels of living. As a matter of fact, it occurs to me that the conventional family budgetary study did not give sufficient weight to the amount of personal property, home conveniences, and the like, owned by farm families. Inventories of such items represent expenditures and savings over a number of years, whereas, a family account study usually represents expenditures only for a single year.

Social Status and Social Security

This field of rural sociological research was mentioned more frequently than any other by sociologists consulted in connection with this paper. In this field fall projects dealing with farm ownership and tenancy, farm labor, technological change, and unemployment. It is logically impossible, of course, to carry on a project in this field without at the same time including much subject matter which is thought of as being "standards of living" or "population." In the past, studies in these fields have played around such subjects as: the agricultural ladder, relation of tenancy to levels of living, tenure history, tenure changes and mobility, education and farm tenancy, social participation and farm tenancy, population factors and farm tenancy, farm income and farm tenancy, farm leases, landlord-tenant relations, farm labor, migratory farm labor, social aspects of farm mechanization, rural unemployment, and so on. Some studies are now being carried on in this field, particularly in Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and North Carolina.

Any number of worthwhile research projects in this field might be mentioned but some of the more pressing problems are:

1. The factors affecting the mobility of tenant farmers and farm laborers. Age of family heads, size of families, size of farms, types of farms, education, farm income, productivity of the land, soil erosion, fluctuation in farm prices, types of farm leases, and landlord-tenant relations, are some of the factors that may account for mobility of tenant farmers and laborers.
2. The agricultural ladder during the decade 1930-40. Movement up and down the agricultural ladder may be analyzed in relation to farm prices and income, population movements, farm mechanization, the programs of agricultural adjustment, Farm Security, and the Work Projects Administrations.
3. Case studies of successful and satisfactory landlord-tenant relations. Too often we have placed the emphasis upon the sordid and pathological aspects of farm tenancy. Perhaps a careful study of hundreds of cases of successful and satisfactory landlord-tenant arrangements would reveal the logical steps to be followed in land tenure reform. As the investigator gains experience in these case studies, he might be able to devise a short schedule which could be used in analyzing a larger number of cases statistically.
4. The social effects of tenant farming and tenant mobility. Although many studies of this character have been made in the past there is much room for improvement in method and in analysis. The simple association of low living levels with farm tenancy is not sufficient proof of causal relationships. Some new method should be developed to determine more realistically the relation between level of living and farm tenancy.

5. The social effects of technical changes in agriculture-- including effects on employment, loss of tenure status, types and quantities of farm labor used, birth rates, population movements, and on rural communities and service agencies.
6. The incomes, levels of living, and social problems of farm laborers in different types of farming areas. During the coming decade the problem of farm labor will likely become more intensified. Problems of providing educational and social services for farm laborers and particularly for itinerant laborers should be one of the main objectives of our studies.

The Field of Population Research

The most amazing development in social research during the past decade has been in the field of population. The organization of the Population Association of America and the number of publications in the field are tangible evidence of its importance and growth. Rural sociologists have a basic interest in population; because people make up a large part of the tangible, countable stuff of rural society. Studies in this field have been numerous partly because of the easy accessibility of the data; but mainly because studies of rural population help to reveal and describe the nature and causes of serious social and economic maladjustments. In other words rural sociologists do not carry on population studies for the pure joy of making beautiful statistical tables and mathematical calculations.

In a sense population studies are more basic to the field of rural sociology than are standards of living studies. Certainly standards of living data cannot be properly interpreted and applied except in relation to the basic facts of population. On the other hand population study becomes a sort of recreational arithmetic unless it is related in some way to standards of living or to some problem of social adjustment, such as farm tenancy or farm labor.

During the next few years, thanks to the 1940 Census, we will have available much up-to-date population data. Many of us will continue along conventional lines of population research. This is necessary but we should not be satisfied with relatively simple analysis of population statistics just because they are interesting. After all we are presuming to be social scientists. Therefore, we must push on to new frontiers of research method.

As Dr. Wilson Gee suggested in a letter on this subject one of the most needed lines of population research relates to the qualitative and biologically inheritable characteristics of our rural populations. As you well know a most common defense for the backwardness existing in the South along economic and social lines is to the effect that the population in

many problem areas and classes is biologically inferior. In an absolute sense the problem may be unsolvable. Nevertheless it is a challenging one and great acclaim will come to those of you who may be able to invent or to discover effective methods of solving it. One approach might be through careful case studies of families over a period of several generations. Looking to the future of sociology as a science, it might be well to consider the encouragement of the keeping of a new type of family genealogies and records by rural families. The records should contain brief biographies of family members, emphasizing particularly income and occupational factors. Some institution could be designated as a depository for duplicates of such records, thus making them available to research workers. In several generations these data might well become the basis for a scientific eugenics program.

The cultural history of southern population groups offers further opportunity for diagnosing the social behavior of our present-day farmers. Studies of cultural islands now being made by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics are suggestive of what might be done in this field.

Another outstanding problem in this field is the relation of population distribution and migration to resources. The population factor is one corner of a three-cornered problem, the other two factors being resources and culture. A promising approach to this problem would be, it seems to me, a careful analysis of the migration and backing up of population in certain areas. The comparative advantage of certain areas for self-sufficing farming may prove to be a significant factor. Consider, for instance, the high percentage of milk cows in such problem areas as the Southern Appalachians and the Northern Lake States Cut-over.

In connection with this question of population distribution more attention should be centered on ways and means of relocating families on the more productive lands. If, for instance, the farm population of the nation were distributed in proportion to farm income, North Carolina would lose nearly a million people, whereas a State like Iowa would gain about the same number. Obviously mass transplanting of farm populations is out of the picture. Nevertheless the mere contemplation of such a possibility suggests that population redistribution is closely related to institutional patterns and to standards of living.

The Field of Community Organization

I have a feeling that the coming decade will see a revival of interest in community organization research in the South. Heretofore few community studies have been made by southern rural sociologists. The reason for this condition is simply that other fields have seemed more important, particularly to the one-man staffs of the sociology divisions of our agricultural experiment stations. Now that we are apparently moving into a period of social and agricultural planning, more attention will be

focused on the rural community, the final crucible of all State and National programs and plans.

With the development of rapid transportation many people thought that thousands of rural communities would be absorbed into neighboring villages and towns. Certainly economy and efficiency seemed to favor the breakdown of the rural community, the consolidation of rural schools and churches, and the elimination of the crossroads country general store. As a result of this feeling on the part of educational leaders and others, the school consolidation movement swept the countryside. Frequently one consolidated school was set up to serve an entire county. Studies in Louisiana and possibly elsewhere have shown that consolidation, based as it is on a narrow theory of economic efficiency, has gone too far in a great many cases. Secondary relationships in education have been forced upon farm people who have for generations lived in an atmosphere of primary face to face relationships. Neighborhoods which once served as vital centers of farm life were all but destroyed and even the larger community centers were neglected as most public services were concentrated in the county seats and larger towns.

Perhaps I have stated the case too strongly. Nevertheless a few recent community studies in the South have shown that in the field of social and agricultural planning at least, the rural community is yet to be reckoned with. This raises the question: When is a community socially self-sufficient? Rural sociologists are now saying that a rural community can be socially self-sufficient without being at the same time economically self-sufficient. In other words social self-sufficiency does not depend upon economic self-sufficiency.

This discussion points the way toward needed research in the field of community organization. A few typical research opportunities may be stated as follows:

1. Factors affecting the size, structure, and social efficiency of rural communities. Some of the factors to be studied in this connection are: (a) Population distribution and density; (b) Topography; (c) Automobiles and good roads; (d) Consolidation of rural schools; (e) Proximity to large urban centers; (f) The general level of living; (g) Farm tenancy and other types of social stratification; (h) The rural church situation; (i) Type of leadership available.
2. Social participation of different social and economic strata in relation to community size and structure. A practical objective here is to develop organization methods which will make the maximum public services available to the low income groups.

3. The role of rural leadership in rural community organization.
4. Social attitudes as factors in the social functioning of rural community.
5. Studies of rural trade centers such as have been made by Lynn Smith of Louisiana might well be duplicated in a number of Southern States.

Other studies might be suggested but nearly any particular community organization problem could be investigated under one or the other of the above listed projects.

Social and Agricultural Planning

In this field, falls all of those research projects dealing with action programs -- either in operation or proposed. Other research fields deal with conditions and problems but the field of social planning deals with objectives, reform proposals, ways and means of solving problems. One type of project would involve a search for successful demonstrations of what is desired -- such as successful and satisfactory landlord-tenant relations. Another type of project would attempt to measure the importance of attitudes toward plans and programs. A third type of project would search historical sources for experiences with similar plans, programs, or policies. A fourth type of project would measure the progress of action programs in achieving their social objectives. A fifth type of project would seek to determine the conditions under which specific populations could be moved from marginal land to better lands. A practical and important question here is: "What standards of living should be aimed at in resettling a group of poor families from a marginal land area?"

Conclusion

There is a great deal to be said for a relatively simple and practical classification of needed rural sociological research. I am thinking particularly of the fact that most of us are working in agricultural colleges and experiment stations where most scientific research is of the practical and applied type. Just because our research has practical objectives does not mean that we cannot at the same time build up a body of principles which could be classified as pure or theoretical sociology. As rural sociologists we must speak a language understood alike by the farmer in the field and the agricultural research director. But we are also sociologists; and in that capacity, we can go home in the evening, close our study door and rearrange our data within the abstract framework of general sociology. Perhaps only one or two of us will become famous as sociologists; but all of us can become competent research workers and influential leaders in our own States in the field of rural sociology.

